

Teaching at a Liberal Arts University as a Graduate of The University of Chicago

The Basics: UChicago vs. Wesleyan University

The University of Chicago	Wesleyan University
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2887 full-time faculty• 6595 undergraduate students• 9889 graduate students• Urban educational setting, mixed on-campus/off-campus residency• Exclusive, private institution• 7.3% acceptance rate in 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Around 400 faculty members, including 239 tenured and tenure-track faculty• Around 3,000 undergraduates• Limited graduate program (around 100 per year in Graduate Liberal Studies, 140 in the natural sciences, mathematics, and ethnomusicology)• Small town/semi-rural educational setting; full on-campus residency• Exclusive, private institution• 17.5% acceptance rate in 2019

Community size and pedagogical orientation—graduate vs. undergraduate—are the key differences. In practice, many Wesleyan undergrads have abilities similar to early-career graduate students elsewhere.



The Liberal Arts Education Model

Wesleyan University is dedicated to providing an education in the liberal arts that is characterized by boldness, rigor, and practical idealism. At Wesleyan, distinguished scholar-teachers work closely with students, taking advantage of fluidity among disciplines to explore the world with a variety of tools. The University seeks to build a diverse, energetic community of students, faculty, and staff who think critically and creatively and who value independence of mind and generosity of spirit.

In other words, liberal arts education is *both informed by and engaged with the world in which it is embedded*. At its most basic, this means removing scholarship from the abstract and linking it in to the concrete. For example: what might ancient Chinese philosophy have to teach us about everyday histories today, both in China and beyond? What links might we draw between burgeoning fascism in Japan in 1925 and global populism in 2020? The point is to establish a *bridge of relevance* between scholarly investigation and everyday life.

Wesleyan's Scholar-Teacher Model

Wesleyan's scholar-teacher model is based on the premise that a robust liberal arts education is most effectively provided by instructors who actively contribute to the state of knowledge and practice in their respective fields. This scholarly engagement is understood to promote students' appreciation of intellectual rigor and the processes that yield new insights, ideas, and expressions, while ensuring that academic curricula respond dynamically to new developments in methods and directions of inquiry and performance. Conversely, the model posits that the fresh perspectives provided by close interaction with undergraduates can lead to new avenues of inquiry and expression. To support its faculty's complementary pursuits of scholarly engagement and effective undergraduate teaching, the University provides relatively light teaching loads, a generous sabbatical policy, and a program of grants in support of scholarship and pedagogical innovation. In the sciences, graduate programs facilitate the conduct of high-level laboratory-based research that further bolsters the connection between scholarship and undergraduate education.

The scholar-teacher is a model and a guide for engaged learning, and generally enjoys extensive, individuated engagement with students in small-class settings.

How is the (TT) Scholar-Teacher Evaluated?

Colleagueship

Though vague, “colleagueship” generally means contribution to the Department or College and participation in its activities; willingness to both partake in and develop events, talks, and other initiatives; willingness to assist colleagues (class visits, chapter/article reviews, etc.); and so on.

Research

By the time of tenure review (generally in the 7th year), faculty members should be able to present “a few” articles and book chapters in high-quality publications, “evidence of face-to-face activities” such as conferences, *evidence of a post-tenure “next project”* (in the form of an article, chapter, or conference presentation) and a scholarly manuscript accepted unconditionally for publication at a well-regarded scholarly press.

Teaching

Candidates for tenure must present evidence of being effective, high-quality teachers, generally in the form of data and comments garnered from established teaching evaluation processes. *Teaching is key, and is emphasized over publish-or-perish.*



Teaching Evaluations

Aalgaard, Scott (CEAS 395) (01)

Please rate the course and the instructor on the following criteria:

	Response Count	Min	25th Percentile	Median	Mean	75th Percentile	Max
I knew what was expected of me in this course.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
The assignments were a useful part of the course.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
There was a clear connection between instruction and assessment.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
Instructor conveyed enthusiasm for the subject.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
Instructor communicated knowledge effectively.	6	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
Instructor treated students with respect.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
Instructor was accessible outside of class.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
My understanding/ skills grew as a result of this course.	7	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00

Evaluation scale runs from 1 through 9; “good” scores are generally regarded to be in the 6~7 range

Teaching Evaluations

Please rate the overall quality of:

Question	Course				Class Size (Under 20)				Division of Course (1)			
	Response Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Response Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Response Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median
The Course	7	9.00	0.00	9.00	5170	7.32	1.68	8.00	3517	7.39	1.64	8.00
The Teaching	7	9.00	0.00	9.00	5110	7.48	1.76	8.00	3495	7.57	1.70	8.00

- Note comparisons with other classes of similar size, and with other classes in the same Division
- Students generally take the evaluations very seriously, and understand them as an important means to have their say in the makeup of the University
- Though not shown here, written student feedback—comments—as a (perhaps the) key component of evaluations. Students tend to be readily forthcoming with these comments. Faculty who are passionate and engaged with their teaching tend to do well.

Balancing Scholarly Demands & Working Toward Tenure

- *Do not overextend yourself.* Attempting full teaching and research schedules simultaneously will simply detract from both, negatively impacting evaluations and your tenure case.
- Teach when you're teaching—but always be learning from your students. Always be enhancing your core research projects, even if simply via an ongoing “notes and inspirations” document.
- Research and write in non-teaching periods—but always with an eye to polishing your core courses. Always be tweaking (not overhauling!) courses on the bases of new insights and discoveries.
- Have an established ‘library’ of courses (usually 4 or 5). Start developing them as a graduate student; take advantage of CEAS/EALC course fellowships, adapt the courses you develop to your new institution. Avoid radical revisions or coming up with brand-new courses until after tenure. Course reputation builds your personal reputation among a close-knit student body.
- Think well in advance about events or lectures that you might propose and facilitate. Get colleagues on board, make contacts, work slowly and methodically.



Wesleyan University

First-Year Reflections

The problem of visibility and enrollment in a small campus community
(class visits, colleague networks, and building a “disciple system”)

The importance of general appeal and making strategic use of the “bait-and-switch”

Meet students where they are—but don’t let them stay there
(the difference between pushing and overwhelming)

Understanding what UChicago rigor can—and cannot—do for your students
(equipping students to “change the world” by embedding UChicago rigor within the liberal-arts model, rather than adopting rigor as a means *and* an end)

Never underestimate the liberal arts student!

